

THANK YOU!

Many thanks for your involvement in the Maternal Health Study. The study is now entering its sixth year and over 1500 women are taking part. The findings will be used to inform clinical midwifery and obstetric practice and strengthen primary care strategies to support women during and after pregnancy.

Study progress:

By May 2008, the number of women who had completed each stage of the study was as follows:

Phase 1

Q1 (early pregnancy)	1507
Interview 1 (30-32 weeks pregnancy)	1459 (97%)
Q2 (3 months postpartum)	1431 (95%)
Q3 (6 months postpartum)	1399 (93%)
Interview 2 (9 months postpartum)	1386 (92%)
Q4 (12 months postpartum)	1356 (90%)
Q5 (18 months postpartum)	1296 (88%)

Phase 2

Q6 (6 months after subsequent birth)	472
Q7 (12 months after subsequent birth)	344

Follow up after second and subsequent births

Thank you to all of the women who have already let us know that they are expecting another baby and/or recently had a baby. We are delighted that so many women have sent us emails, phoned us or sent back one of our study postcards to let us know about new babies. Questionnaires are mailed out 6 and 12 months after second and subsequent births.

If you are expecting another baby and haven't already let us know, we would love to hear from you.

We also like receiving photos of your children as they grow up!

If you would like more information about this phase of the study, please contact Sue or Hannah on 03 9090 5208.

Spotlight on health in pregnancy


Very few studies have looked closely at the impact of pregnancy on women's physical and psychological health, or quality of life, before and after the birth of a baby.

Common symptoms in pregnancy include exhaustion, back pain, nausea and vomiting, urinary incontinence, constipation and haemorrhoids. These symptoms are often referred to as 'minor discomforts of pregnancy', but they can make life for pregnant women very miserable.

97% of women in the study reported at least one health issue in early pregnancy, and 16% reported four or more health issues. Tiredness, nausea and vomiting, constipation and back pain were the most common problems reported by women in early pregnancy. Younger women (18-24 years) were more likely than older women to experience a greater number of health issues in early pregnancy. Younger women also had poorer overall health status and poorer mental health.

Susan Perlen and Deirdre Gartland are analysing these data, and have presented the findings at two national conferences this year. They are currently writing up the results for publication.





Anxiety during and after pregnancy: a hidden problem

According to a recent World Health Organisation report depression is the leading cause of disability amongst women and has a major impact on women's level of functioning.

Women are more likely than men to develop depression, and during the postnatal period, women are three times more likely to become depressed than at other times in their lives.

Compared with the amount of attention that has been given to maternal depression, anxiety symptoms experienced during pregnancy and after childbirth have received far less attention.

The proportion of women in the study who reported severe anxiety or panic attacks was lowest in late pregnancy and highest in the first three months postpartum. In early pregnancy one in five women (19%) reported experiencing intense anxiety or panic attacks, compared with 38% of women during the first three months postpartum. By six months slightly less women (27%) reported severe anxiety symptoms.

Many women experiencing anxiety also reported depressive symptoms. Those women experiencing anxiety symptoms alone were less likely to have talked to a general practitioner or other health professionals about their emotional well-being than women experiencing depression and anxiety, or depression alone. Only 25% of women reporting anxiety symptoms alone had spoken to a GP about it.

One in six women reporting emotional difficulties stated that they were too embarrassed to seek help or that there was no-one they were comfortable talking to about issues affecting their emotional health and well-being.

Hannah Woolhouse has recently submitted a paper for publication based on these findings, and is also presenting a paper at the General Practice and Primary Health Care Conference in Hobart in June.

Four and half year follow-up of all women in the study

In March we commenced follow-up of women four and a half years after the birth of their first child. We are delighted that so many women have stayed in contact with us and agreed to participate in this stage of the study.

The questionnaire - the eighth one in the study - asks primarily about your health and well-being. There are also some new questions about balancing paid work, study and family life. Your answers to these questions will help us to put some context around changes affecting women's health and well-being in the four years since the birth of their first child.

We are interested to find out whether health issues you may have experienced after having your first child recur after second or subsequent births, and how much these health issues continue to be a part of your life by the time your first child is four years old.

If you would like more information about this phase of the study, please see the study website www.mcri.edu.au/maternalhealthstudy/ or contact Sue or Hannah on 03 9090 5208.

Keeping in touch

It is very important for us to keep in touch with everyone who enrolls in the study. Please let us know if your contact details change. You are welcome to phone us at any time, or alternatively, you can send us your new contact details by post or email.

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